

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

Listing of claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A composition suitable for forming a low fat cheese, said composition comprising a starter acidification culture and an exopolysaccharide (EPS) fermentation culture wherein said EPS culture contains a viable lactic acid microorganism selected from the group consisting of *Streptococcus thermophilus* V3, *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *cremoris* 322, *Lactobacillus sakei* 570, and *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* 808, wherein said lactic acid microorganism is capable of producing an enzyme, and wherein said enzyme is capable of producing an EPS.
2. **(Previously Presented)** A composition according to claim 1 wherein the starter acidification culture comprises a microorganism that is capable of fermenting lactic acid.
3. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 2 wherein said starter acidification culture is a culture of a lactic acid bacterium.
- Claims 4-5. **(Cancelled)**
6. **(Previously Presented)** A composition according to claim 1 wherein EPS production occurs separately from acidification by said starter acidification culture.
7. **(Previously Presented)** A composition according to claim 6 wherein EPS is produced *in situ*.

8. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 7 wherein said EPS is produced in the presence of a suitable enzyme substrate selected from the group consisting of sucrose, fructose, glucose, maltose, lactose, stacchiose, raffinose and verbascose.
9. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 8, wherein the EPS is a hetero-EPS.
10. **(Previously Presented)** A composition according to claim 9, wherein the lactic acid microorganism of the EPS fermentation culture is *Streptococcus thermophilus* V3.
11. **(Previously Presented)** A composition according to claim 9 wherein the lactic acid microorganism is *Lactococcus lactis* ssp. *cremoris* 322.
12. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 7, wherein the EPS is a homo-EPS.
13. **(Cancelled)**
14. **(Previously Presented)** A composition according to claim 12, wherein the lactic acid bacterium of the EPS fermentation culture is *Lactobacillus sakei* 570.
15. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim 12, wherein the lactic acid bacterium of the EPS fermentation culture is *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* ~~808~~ 808.
16. **(Currently Amended)** A process of preparing a low fat cheese product comprising adding to a medium suitable for forming low fat cheese product, a composition according to

claim 1, wherein the microorganism of said composition produces an enzyme, and said enzyme produces an EPS.

17. **(Currently Amended)** A low fat cheese product prepared by the process of claim 16, wherein said low fat cheese product comprises the composition according to claim 1.

18. **(Currently Amended)** A low fat cheese product according to claim 17 wherein the low fat cheese product is a soft cheese product.

19. **(Previously Presented)** A process according to claim 16 wherein said EPS is capable of modulating the moisture level of said product.

20. **(Currently Amended)** A process according to claim 16 wherein the target moisture in the low fat cheese product is ~~capable of being~~ achieved by ~~optimising-retarding~~ whey release during curd processing.

21. **(Currently Amended)** A process according to claim 16 wherein said EPS increases the ~~stability and/or~~ elasticity of ~~said~~ curd.

22. **(Cancelled)**

23. **(Previously Presented)** A process according to claim 21 wherein said curd is capable of being manipulated with conventional curd manipulating equipment.

24. **(Currently Amended)** A low fat cheese product according to claim 17 wherein said EPS is capable of forming a cheese curd containing about 50% moisture level.
25. **(Currently Amended)** A low fat cheese product according to claim 24, wherein said curd has less than 5% loss in moisture during ripening to a low fat cheese product.
26. **(Cancelled)**
27. **(Currently Amended)** A method for forming a low fat cheese comprising admixing a composition with a medium suitable for forming low fat cheese so as to form a low fat cheese curd containing about 50% moisture and wherein during ripening of the low fat cheese ~~product~~ less than about 5% moisture is lost; wherein the composition is a composition according to claim 1.
28. **(Currently Amended)** A low fat cheese ~~product~~ obtained according to the method of claim 27.
29. **(Cancelled)**
30. **(Previously Presented)** A process for *in situ* production of an EPS comprising the steps of:
- providing a composition according to claim 1, and
 - permitting growth of said microorganism so as to produce the EPS.
31. **(Original)** A process according to claim 30 wherein said EPS is a homo-EPS.

32. **(Previously Presented)** A process according to claim 30 wherein the microorganism is *Lactobacillus sakei* 570.

Claims 33-36. **(Cancelled)**

37. **(Previously Presented)** A culture of *Lactobacillus sakei* strain 570 deposited as DSM 15889 at the Deutsche Sammlung von Mikroorganismen und Zellkulturen GmbH.

38. **(Cancelled)**

39. **(New)** The composition according to claim 1 wherein said low fat cheese has up to 6% fat.

40. **(New)** The process according to claim 16 wherein said low fat cheese product has up to 6% fat.

41. **(New)** The low fat cheese product according to claim 17 wherein said low fat cheese product has up to 6% fat.

42. **(New)** The method according to claim 27 wherein said low fat cheese has up to 6% fat.

43. **(New)** The low fat cheese product according to claim 28 wherein said low fat cheese product has up to 6% fat.